

K.A.M.—

ISAIAH ISRAEL

TEMPLE

Preliminary Summary of Information
November 3, 1975

Commission on Chicago Historical
and Architectural Landmarks

K. A. M. - Isaiah Israel Temple
1100 East Hyde Park Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois

Architect: Alfred Altschuler

Dates of Construction: 1924, Addition, 1973

K. A. M. - Isaiah Israel Temple houses the oldest Jewish congregation in the Midwest. This group is the result of the 1971 merger of Kehilath Anshe Mayriv (K.A.M.), which was organized in 1847 and Temple Isaiah Israel. Isaiah Israel is also an historic congregation having its roots in Kehilah B'nai Sholom which was organized in 1852 and merged in 1906 with Temple Israel (organized in 1896) to form B'nai Sholom Temple Israel. B'nai Sholom Temple Israel merged with Temple Isaiah (organized in 1895) to constitute Temple Isaiah Israel in 1924.

The earliest permanent Jewish settlers came to Chicago in 1841. They were Benedict Shubarg, Philip Neuberg, Isaac Ziegler and Henry Horner. By 1845, these men were joined by six others and they then had the required minyan (ten adult Jewish males) to hold services during the High Holydays. Following this, a sense of community emerged and, according to the custom followed in Europe, a Jewish Burial Society was organized. Funds were collected and an acre plot for use as a cemetery was purchased in what is now Lincoln Park.

Chicago's Jewish population continued to grow and, in 1847, K. A. M. (The Congregation of the Men of the West) was constituted. Most of the 14 men who signed the constitution were Jews of German descent. In 1851, the K. A. M. Congregation dedicated its first synagogue on Clark Street between Quincy and Jackson. In Andreas' History of Chicago, 1849 is the date given for the construction of this synagogue. Also in 1849, K. A. M. was able to engage its first Rabbi, Ignatz Kunruether. In 1852, as the immigration of Jews to Chicago continued, a second congregation began, Kehilah B'nai Sholom which was made up largely of Jews of Prussian-Polish descent.

The eighteen-fifties were years of growth for Chicago's Jewish community. In 1855, K. A. M. moved to a larger structure at the corner of Adams and Wells streets. They began their first parochial day school in November, 1859. The school continued to operate until the 1870s. With the growth of the reform movement in Judaism, dissension

arouse within K. A. M. and, in 1861, twenty of its members left K. A. M. to form the Sinai congregation. Rabbi Leibman Adler joined K. A. M. that year. Alder was profoundly opposed to slavery and many of his early sermons were on this subject. He was instrumental in the forming of the Concordia Guards, a Jewish company which was filled with volunteers within its first thirty-six hours. The Guards were attached to the 82nd Illinois Company and distinguished themselves in many Civil War battles including Gettysberg. Adler encouraged his seventeen year old son, Dankmar, to join the Guards.

After the Civil War, in 1865, K. A. M. moved again. This time it was to a structure they built on the corner of Wabash Avenue and Peck Court (now east 8th Street). It was destroyed during the Fire of 1871. After the Fire, K. A. M. purchased a church at the corner of 26th and Indiana Avenue and converted it into a synagogue. K. A. M. continued to grow and, in the late 1880's, engaged Dankmar Adler, Rabbi Liebman Adler's son and partner in the prestigious firm of Adler and Sullivan, to draw architectural plans for a new building on 33rd and Indiana. This structure was dedicated in 1891. The structure on 26th and Indiana was sold to Temple B'nai Sholom.

During the 1890s, several other Jewish congregations were organized on the South Side. Among them was Temple Israel which was constituted in 1896 and merged with B'nai Sholom in 1906 forming Temple B'nai Sholom Israel. The newly merged congregation held its services at the Temple Israel Synagogue on Forty-fourth Street and St. Lawrence Avenues. It continued to utilize that structure until it moved, in 1913, to the corner of 53rd and Michigan. Temple Isaiah was organized in 1895 and built its first structure in 1899 at 45th Street and South Vincennes Avenue. Temple Isaiah sold this structure in the early 1920's and moved into the former Adler House on Greenwood Avenue just north of Hyde Park Boulevard. They commissioned architect Alfred Altschuler to design a new synagogue on the corner of Hyde Park Boulevard and Greenwood Avenue. Upon completion of this structure in 1924, Temple Isaiah merged with Temple B'nai Sholom Israel to form Temple Isaiah Israel. In 1971, Temple Isaiah Israel committed itself to maintaining the structure by merging with K. A. M. and forming K. A. M. Isaiah Israel. A building program ensued and a community center housing a chapel, offices and other rooms was completed as an annex to the synagogue in 1973.

The structure that houses K. A. M. - Isaiah Israel was designed by Alfred Altschuler and constructed in 1924. The rectangular structure is somewhat Byzantine in its

design and constructed of randomly patterned, polychromatic red brick with limestone trim. A series of steps on the west side of the building leads to the main entrance which has three arched doorways separated by columns. The massive oak doors have heavy bronze hinges and are studded with bronze rosettes. Above each doorway is a symbolic bas relief. The entrance is flanked by lighting braziers of beaten bronze. Recessed into the facade to either side of the entrance are pairs of arched windows separated by a column. Along the south and north walls of the entrance hall are three similar windows. On either side of the structure, above the entrance hall, are two octagonal apses with a narrow arched stained-glass window on each side. Behind the entrance hall is the main part of the structure, an octagonal domed auditorium supported by eight pillars and rising eighty feet. Three arched stained-glass windows separated by columns punctuate each of the eight walls of the auditorium. The patterns in the glass depict various biblical scenes. The focal point of the richly appointed interior of the auditorium is the Ark, which is of carved travertine marble with brilliantly colored mosaics. The marble is inlaid with gold and inscribed in Hebrew "Know before Whom thou standest." Behind the auditorium is a low rectangular area containing the Rabbi's study. The study can be entered from either the auditorium or from an entranceway on the building's south side facing Hyde Park Boulevard. To the east of this entranceway, two arched windows separated by columns are recessed in the facade.

In 1973, a community center housing offices, chapel, sculpture garden, library, and meeting rooms were added to the north portion of the synagogue linking it with the school built in 1948.